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ABSTRACT

A study used the seven elements of B. D. Ruben's Intercultural Behavioral Assessment Indices (IBAI) to investigate the concept of intercultural communication competence. Subjects, 149 foreign students enrolled in a large midwestern university in the United States, completed five questionnaires designed to measure the seven elements of the IBAI (display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, role behaviors, interaction management, and tolerance of ambiguity). In addition, 129 American students who knew the foreign students well served as raters in the study. Results of Pearson product-moment correlations indicated significant relationships among the seven elements of the IBAI. Multiple stepwise regressions of the predictors of the seven elements indicated that: (1) predictors for display of respect include assertiveness, rewarding impressions, perceptiveness, and social anxiety; (2) orientation to knowledge was best predicted by amount of disclosure; (3) relational roles behavior and tolerance of ambiguity were best predicted by public rituals; and (4) interaction management was best predicted by responsiveness. Findings suggest that the IBAI is a reliable instrument for measuring intercultural communication competence. Further research, however, needs to consider personal attributes, psychological acclimation, and cultural awareness for communicative competence in different cultures. (Two tables of data are included; 50 references are attached.) (RS)

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A Test of Intercultural Communication Competence

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Abstract

This study investigated the concept of intercultural communication comeptence. The seven elements of Ruben's (1976) Intercultural Behavioral Assessment Indices (IBAI) were examined in the study. For the purpose of this study 149 foreign students and 129 Americans were asked to serve as participants. The results of Pearson product-moment correlations indicated significant relationships among the seven elements of IBAI. Multiple stepwise regressions were also conducted to examine the predictors of the seven elements of IBAI. Finally, limitation and directions for future research were discussed.

A Test of Intercultural Communication Competence

When people sojourn in a foreign country, some adapt well to the new environment within a short period of time, while others find the new environment a nightmare. One of the main reasons why some find new environments problematic is that most familiar symbols they use in daily lives change suddenly in the strange culture. They then begin to reject, consciously or unconsciously, the new ways of life which cause discomfort.

Worse than that, some become victims of "culture shock." Symptoms of culture shock include washing hands excessively, being overly concerned with food and drinking, fearing people, being absent-minded, refusing to learn the host country's language and customs, and worrying about being robbed, cheated, or injured (Oberg, 1960; Smalley, 1963). Eventually, the only way to eliminate this problem is by returning to one's homeland. If sojourners cannot return home, the difficulty in cross-cultural adaptation may cause severe psychological or psychiatric problems such as paranoia, depression, schizophrenia, and lack of confidence (Yeh, Chu, Klein, Alexander, & Miller, 1981). These maladies suggest the importance of being competent in adaptation to new environments. Owing to the increase of face-to-face contact among people of different cultures in recent years, we live in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent. It is therefore most urgent that we study intercultural communication competence.

Although consensus has not been reached concerning the conceptualization of intercultural communication competence, the

concept has been investigated by scholars from different disciplines (e.g., Chen, 1989; Collier, 1989; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984; Hammer, 1987, 1989; Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1987; Martin & Hammer, 1989; Ruben, 1976, 1977; Wiseman & Abe, 1984; Wiseman, Hammer, & Nishida, 1989). Ruben's (1976, 1977) studies are two of the earliest investigations on the concept of intercultural communication competence. Ruben identified seven elements and created a general model for intercultural communication competence. In addition, Ruben designed the Intercultural Behavioral Assessment Indices as the instrument of measuring intercultural communication competence. The instrument was found to be mostly reliable (Ruben, 1976), and a simplified version has been developed by Koester and Olebe (1988). The purpose of this study is to test Ruben's instrument and further examine the predictors that explain the seven elements of intercultural communication competence explicated in the instrument.

Intercultural Behavioral Assessment Indices

Communication competence was conceptualized by Ruben (1976) as "the ability to function in a manner that is perceived to be relatively consistent with the needs, capacities, goals, and expectations of the individuals in one's environment while satisfying one's own needs, capacities, goals, and expectations" (p. 336). Based on this definition of communication competence Ruben identified seven behavioral elements that make individuals function effectively in intercultural settings. The seven elements

are: display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, role behaviors, interaction management, and tolerance of ambiguity.

Display of respect refers to "the ability to express respect and positive regard for another person" (Ruben, 1976, p. 339). This element includes behavioral cues such as eye contact, body posture, voice tone and pitch, and general displays of interest in the interaction. Interaction posture refers to "the ability to respond to others in a descriptive, nonevaluating, and nonjudgmental way" (p. 340). According to Ruben, the more competent the individuals are, the more descriptive and less evaluative or judgmental they are.

Orientation to knowledge refers to the ability to recognize "the extent to which knowledge is individual in nature" (p. 340). The hierarchical order for individuals in intercultural communication is first and foremost, intrapersonal orientation, then interpersonal orientation, cultural orientation, and last, physical orientation. Empathy is the ability to "put oneself in another's shoes" (p. 340). A highly empathic individual usually responds accurately to "apparent and less apparent expressions of feeling and thought by others" and usually "projects interest and provides verbal and nonverbal cues that he or she understands the state of affairs of others" (p. 349).

Role behaviors refer to the ability to be functionally flexible in different group situations. Role behaviors were classified into task roles, relational roles, and individualistic roles. For the

task roles a competent person shows the ability to complete tasks such as "initiation of ideas, requesting further information or facts, seeking of clarification or group tasks, clarification of task-related issues, evaluation of suggestions of others, or focusing group on task" (p. 350). For relational roles a competent person shows the ability to lead the group to outcomes such as "harmonizing and mediating scraps and/or conflicts between group members, attempts to regulate evenness of contributions of group members," offers comments "relative to the group's dynamics," displays "indications of a willingness to compromise own position for the sake of group consensus," (p. 350) and displays interests. For individualistic roles a competent person would not show behaviors such as resistance to other's ideas, attempt to call attention to him or herself, manipulation of the group, and avoidance of participation in the group activities.

Interaction management refers to the ability to take "turns in discussion and initiating and terminating interaction based on a reasonably accurate assessment of the needs and desires of others" (p. 341). A competent person with high interaction management skill is always concerned with "the interests, tolerances, and orientation of others who are party to discussions" (p. 350).

Finally, tolerance of ambiguity refers to the ability "to react to new and ambiguous situations with little visible discomfort" (p. 341). A competent person with high ambiguity tolerance tends to adapt to the demands of the new situation quickly without "noticeable personal, interpersonal, or group consequences" (p.

352).

Based on the seven elements Ruben (1976) developed the Intercultural Behavioral Assessment Indices (IBAI) for the measurement of intercultural communication competence. Ruben found that the IBAI could be easily administered by untrained observers with efficiency and reliability. The IBAI had previously been tested on a group of trainees bound for overseas assignments and had been found reliable and useful. Three untrained staff members of a seven-day intercultural adaptation training program were asked to observe the participants during meals, coffee or cocktails, and during formal training sessions, and to complete, without collaboration, the IBAI at the conclusion of the training program. The results indicated that interrater reliability on most indices was quite encouraging (Ruben, 1976). Interrater correlations on the elements of display of respect, empathy, self-oriented role behavior, and interaction management were reported to be significant at the .001 level. Interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, and tolerance of ambiguity were significant at the .05 level. However, although task role behavior and relational role behavior yielded interrater correlations in the appropriate range, they fell short of the .05 significant level.

A Q-factor analysis by Ruben (1976) further revealed that there were three types of subjects. Type I individuals were considered to be successful in interpersonal interaction in the host culture. They had high rating scores on orientation to knowledge, tolerance for ambiguity, interaction management, and display of respect, but

low rating scores on individualistic roles behavior. Type II individuals were considered to be essentially a low-profile group that exhibited a mixed behavioral pattern. This group had high rating scores on display of respect, tolerance for ambiguity, and empathy, but low rating scores on task roles behavior, individualistic roles behavior, and interaction management. Type III individuals were expected to encounter difficulty in intercultural interaction in the host culture. They had high rating scores on individualistic roles behavior, but low rating scores on orientation to knowledge, interaction management, relational roles behavior, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and interaction profile. Except for task and individualistic roles behaviors, other elements proved to be reliable components of intercultural communication competence. To further test this instrument two research questions were advanced:

RQ1: What are the relationships among the seven elements of IBAI?

Elements Related to Intercultural Communication Competence

The seven elements of intercultural communication competence identified by Ruben emphasized the behavioral perspective of communication competence. In addition to these communication skills, a number of elements essential to communication competence were also specified by scholars from different disciplines. Those major elements include self-disclosure (Bochner & Kelly, 1974), self-consciousness (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984), social relaxation (Wiemann, 1977), behavioral flexibility (Martin, 1987), interaction

involvement (Cegala, 1981), and the abilities to deal with social difficulties in the host culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1982).

Self-disclosure refers to the process of revealing personal information to one's partners who are not likely to know from other sources (Pearce & Sharp, 1973). According to Bochner and Kelly (1974), self-disclosure is one of the main elements in communication competence. In addition, Parks (1976) indicated that self-disclosure can lead individuals to achieve their goals in communication. However, self-disclosure must be regulated by the norm of appropriateness in which individuals judge the degree of disclosure for a given situation.

Self-consciousness is the ability to know or to monitor oneself. Self-consciousness can help individuals to implement conversationally competent behaviors in interaction (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) and to adjust better in other cultures (Brislin, 1979; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977; Triandis, 1977).

Social relaxation refers to the low levels of communication anxiety. It is assumed that an individual would experience anxiety crises during the initial period of sojourning in a new culture (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Hammer, 1989). Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) indicated that socially relaxed persons are those who are able to get rid of behaviors such as undue perspiration, shakiness, postural rigidity, self and object adaptors, and minimal response tendencies when communicating with other persons. Wiemann (1977) also indicated that competent persons must know how to handle behaviors such as rocking movements, leg and foot movements, body

lean, speech rate, speech disturbances, hesitations, and nonfluencies, and how to manipulate objects.

Behavioral flexibility is the ability to behave appropriately in different situations (Bochner & Kelly, 1974). This is similar to Parks' (1976) creativity and flexibility dimension. Parks felt that, for creativity and flexibility, an individual must demonstrate ability to be accurate and "flexible in attending to information," to be flexible "in the response repertoire," and to be flexible "in selecting strategies" in order to achieve personal goals in communication (p. 16). This ability of behavioral flexibility was found to be one of the dimensions of intercultural communication competence (Martin, 1987). Wiemann (1977) as well indicated that behavioral flexibility consists of verbal immediacy cues and the alternation and co-occurrence of specific speech choices that mark the status and affiliative relationships of interactants. Moreover, Wheeless and Duran (1982) proposed adaptability as one of the dimensions of communicative competence. According to Wheeless and Duran (1982), communication adaptability focuses on the variety of individual experiences and "the ability to be flexible and feel comfortable with a variety of people" (p. 55).

Interaction involvement is the ability to be attentive, responsive and perceptive in interaction. Cegala (1981) found that interaction involvement is one of the dimensions of communication competence. The dimension mainly emphasizes individual empathic and other-oriented ability in interaction.

Finally, the ability to deal with social difficulties caused by the host culture is one way to help sojourners psychologically acclimate to a new environment. According to Furnham (1986, 1987) and Furnham and Bochner (1982), psychological adaptation is typically associated with personal ability to deal with situations such as frustration, stress, alienation, and ambiguity caused by the host culture. That is, psychological adaptation indicates how individuals deal with the so-called "social difficulties." Furnham and Bochner's (1982) study has shown that the bigger the difference between the host culture and the sojourner's culture, the greater the social difficulty. The study also demonstrated that foreign students experience greater social difficulty than do the host culture students.

Since these elements are related to communication competence, one might ask how could these elements explain the Ruben's seven elements of intercultural communication competence. In order to examine this problem a research question was proposed as follows:

RQ2: Which of the elements related to communication competence best predict the seven elements of IBAI?

Methods

Respondents and Procedures

Respondents were 149 foreign students enrolling in a large midwest university of the United States. Among them, 55 were females and 94 were males. In addition to the foreign student subjects, 149 Americans, identified by the foreign student subjects as persons who knew them well, were asked to serve as raters in the

study. Among the 149 Americans, 129 persons agreed to participate in this project.

Measurement

Foreign students were asked to complete five questionnaires to measure the above-mentioned elements that are related to communication competence. The 31-item General Disclosure Scale (GDS), developed by Wheeless (1978), was used to measure the foreign student subjects' general tendency of disclosure to Americans. The scale consists of five dimensions: amount of disclosure, consciously intended disclosure, honesty/accuracy of disclosure, positiveness/negativeness of disclosure, and depth/intimacy of disclosure.

Wheeless (1978) has found that the GDS could predict some of the variables which are related to interpersonal solidarity. In addition, Wheeless and Grotz's (1976) earlier study leading to the development of the GDS showed that a self-report self-disclosure measure about a specific target person could be used to measure intent and amount of disclosure; these were related to level of trust in the target person. The coefficient alphas of the five dimensions of GDS ranged from .72 to .88 in the present study.

The 23-item Self-Consciousness Scale, developed by Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss (1975), was used to measure the foreign student subjects' self-consciousness and social relaxation. The scale consists of three dimensions: private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety.

Private self-consciousness is concerned with the attention to

one's inner thoughts and feelings. Public self-consciousness is concerned with general awareness of the self as a social object, one that has an effect on others. Social anxiety is concerned with discomfort people experience in the presence of others. The social-anxiety dimension was used to measure the degree of social relaxation in this study.

Fenigstein's (1974) study has found that women who had high public self-consciousness were more sensitive to rejection by a peer group; and people who were high in private self-consciousness were more responsive to their transient affective state. The coefficient alphas of the scales in this study were .70 for private self-consciousness, .84 for public self-consciousness, and .77 for social anxiety.

The 18-item Interaction Involvement Scale, developed by Cegala (1981), was used to measure the foreign student subjects' interaction involvement ability. The scale consists of three dimensions: responsiveness, perceptiveness, and attentiveness. Responsiveness refers to mental ability to know what to say and when to say in communication; perceptiveness refers to the ability to organize the meaning of interaction; and attentiveness refers to the concentration of one's mind on the conversation in the process of communication.

The dimensions of interaction involvement were found to be related to variables such as empathy, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, support, social relaxation, extroversion, neuroticism, self-consciousness, and communication apprehension

(Cegala et al., 1982; Wiemann, 1977). The coefficient alphas for the three dimensions in this study were .80 for responsiveness, .82 for perceptiveness, and .65 for attentiveness.

The 20-item Communicative Adaptability Scale, developed by Wheeless and Duran (1982), was used to measure the foreign student subjects' degree of behavioral flexibility and adaptability. The scale consists of two dimensions: communication adaptability and rewarding impression. According to Wheeless and Duran (1982), communication adaptability focuses on the variety of individual experiences and "the ability to be flexible and feel comfortable with a variety of people" (p. 55), and rewarding impressions center around "the themes of being other-oriented, sensitive to others, and providing positive feelings toward others" (p. 55).

Studies by Duran (1983) and Wheeless and Duran (1982) indicated that masculinity characteristics were highly correlated with communication adaptability; femininity characteristics were highly correlated with the rewarding impressions; and androgynous individuals scored high on both dimensions. The coefficient alphas of the three dimensions in this study were .88 for communication adaptability, and .85 for rewarding impressions.

The 26-item Social Situations Questionnaire, developed by Furnham and Bochner (1982), was used to measure the foreign student subjects' ability to deal with social difficulties caused by the host culture. The questionnaire consists of six dimensions: formal relations, managing intimate relationships, public rituals, initiating contact, public decision-making, and assertiveness.

Formal relations refer to individuals' knowledge for acting appropriately in the formal situations in the host culture; managing intimate relationships refers to the ability to make friends with the host nationals; public rituals refer to the ability to use the public or private facilities in the host culture; initiating contact deals with the degree of self-disclosure to the host nationals; public decision-making involves the ability to make a decision publicly in the host culture; and assertiveness deals with the ability to handle the hostility or rudeness caused by the host nationals. Furnham and Bochner (1982) have reported that social difficulty was a positive function of culture distance. In other words, the larger the difference between the host culture and the sojourner's culture, the greater the social difficulty sojourners would experience. The coefficient alphas of the six dimensions in this study ranged from .69 to .87.

Finally, the 129 American raters were asked to rate the foreign student subjects on seven items of IBAI. The scores obtained from IBAI constituted the degree of intercultural communication competence of foreign student subjects within the American environment. The coefficient alphas of IBAI was .80 in this study.

Results

In order to examine the relationships among the seven elements of IBAI, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Results indicated that display of respect was significantly correlated with interaction posture ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), orientation to knowledge ($r = .36$, $p < .01$), empathy ($r = .60$, $p < .01$), relational roles behavior ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), interaction management ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), and with tolerance of ambiguity ($r = .37$, $p < .01$).

Interaction posture was significantly correlated with orientation to knowledge ($r = .37$, $p < .01$), empathy ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), relational roles behavior ($r = .55$, $p < .01$), interaction management ($r = .44$, $p < .01$), and with tolerance of ambiguity ($r = .35$, $p < .01$). Orientation to knowledge was significantly correlated with empathy ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), relational roles behavior ($r = .31$, $p < .01$), interaction management ($r = .21$, $p < .01$), and with tolerance of ambiguity ($r = .34$, $p < .01$).

Empathy was significantly correlated with relational roles behavior ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), interaction management ($r = .33$, $p < .01$), and with tolerance of ambiguity ($r = .41$, $p < .01$). Relational roles behavior was significantly correlated with interaction management ($r = .40$, $p < .01$), and tolerance of ambiguity ($r = .32$, $p < .01$). Lastly, interaction management was significantly correlated with tolerance of ambiguity ($r = .29$, $p < .01$).

The purpose of research question 2 is to find out which measure of the elements relating to communication competence best predict the seven elements of IBAI. Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine this question. Each of the seven elements of IBAI were regressed to the measures of the elements relating to communication competence. The results are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 2 About Here

The results indicated that display of respect was best predicted by assertiveness, rewarding impressions, perceptiveness, and social anxiety. Orientation to knowledge was best predicted by amount of self-disclosure. Relational role behavior was best predicted by public rituals, rewarding impressions, and social anxiety. Interaction management was best predicted by responsiveness and social anxiety. Finally, tolerance of ambiguity was best predicted by public rituals.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the elements of intercultural communication competence. The basis of the research began with Ruben's work on the seven elements of IBAI and tested the relationships of the seven elements with other related variables. The overall results of this investigation support the reliability of the seven elements of IBAI accounted for intercultural communication competence.

The first research question examined the relationships among the seven elements of IBAI. Significant correlations were found among the seven elements. Because most of the seven elements of IBAI were behavioral and concerned a sojourner's communication skills that are important in the process of communication, it is not surprising to find that positive relationships exist among them. The results support studies conducted by different scholars. For instance, Sewell and Davidsen (1956) and Deutsch and Won (1963) indicated that a sojourner with good communication skills is especially satisfied and psychologically adjusted in another culture. Ruben and Kealey's study (1979) showed that empathy and interaction were two of the communication skills significantly related to cultural shock.

Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978) indicated that the sojourner's effective communication skills are the basis of being aware of another culture. The authors specifically mentioned that communication skills such as interaction posture and interaction management are necessary for sojourners to gather information about various aspects of the host cultures to interact effectively with the people from the host culture. Research from Martin and Hammer (1989), Spitzberg (1989), and Wiseman, Hammer, and Nishida (1989) all supported the important role communication skills plays in the process of intercultural communication.

Results from analyses of the second research question show predictors of the seven elements of IBAI. Those predictors for display of respect include assertiveness, rewarding impressions,

perceptiveness, and social anxiety. This indicated that individuals with the abilities of speaking out for themselves in the face of rudeness or hostility, of being able to show positive messages to support their counterparts, and of being less anxious in communication tend to express respect and positive regard for another persons in intercultural interaction. These predictors have been found to be related to communication competence (Dodd, 1991; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Parks, 1976, Wiemann, 1977).

Orientation to knowledge was best predicted by amount of disclosure. According to Ruben (1976), people use different terms to describe themselves and the world around them. The more individuals talk on the basis of personal perspective, the easier they will adapt to a new culture. This might be the reason why amount of self-disclosure is correlated with orientation to knowledge.

Relational roles behavior and tolerance of ambiguity were best predicted by public rituals. According to Furnham and Bochner (1982), public rituals refer to the degree of sojourner's familarity with private and public facilities in the host culture. The lack of understanding on public rituals increases the uncertainty level and negatively affect the establishment of relationship with the host nationals. Mikes (1966) indicated that this is a major source of cross-cultural misunderstanding and difficulty.

Lastly, interaction management was best predicted by responsiveness. Responsiveness is a component of interaction

involvement. According to Cegala (1981, 1984), interaction involvement refers to individuals' empathic and other-orented abilities in communication. This concept is very close to interaction management (Chen, 1990). In other words, in order to take turns in conversation, one has to know how to respond appropriately to the messages.

Generally, the results of this study demonstrated that Ruben's (1976) Intercultural Behavioral Assessment Indices is a reliable instrument for measuring intercultural communication competence. The instrument has long been used in the intercultural training programs. Nevertheless, the instrument also shows some problems. For example, Koester and Olebe (1988) discussed the methodological problems of IBAI, and modified the IBAI into an eight-item Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Communication effectiveness (BASIC). Although BASIC was proved to be valid and reliable (Koester & Olebe, 1988; Olebe & Koester, 1989), it did not improve the inherent weakness of the IBAI. That is, the instrument is lengthy.

Ruben (1976) argued that the relatively untrained raters can perform the assessment, after a minimal-time training, by using this instrument. One can see that the instrument is imprecise and lengthy. Such a time-consuming instrument becomes impractical in certain situations. In order to improve this problem future research might try to simplify the instrument for the measurement of intercultural communication competence. Instead of using rater's indices, a self- or other-report questionnaire, based on

the seven elements of IBAI, might be developed for this purpose.

Another limitation of the IBAI is its focus on behavioral aspect of communication. Many studies (e.g. Chen, 1989; Hall, 1959; Turner, 1968; Spitzberg, 1989; Hammer, 1989) have shown that, in addition to communication skills, other abilities such as personal attributes, psychological acclimation, and cultural awareness are also indispensable for being competent in different cultures. Future research needs to consider these elements when studying the concept of intercultural communication competence.

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Table 1

Pearson Correlation Coefficients for the Seven Elements of IBAI

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Display of Respect	.45*	.36*	.60*	.45*	.46*	.37*
2. Interaction Posture		.37*	.32*	.55*	.44*	.35*
3. Orientation to Knowledge			.26*	.31*	.21*	.34*
4. Empathy				.39*	.33*	.41*
5. Relational Roles Behavior					.40*	.32*
6. Interaction Management						.29*
7. Tolerance of Ambiguity						----

Note. N = 129. *p < .01

Table 2

Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regressions Analysis

Source of Variance	R	R^2	F	P	Beta
Display of Respect					
Assertiveness	.18	.03	4.82	.02	-.18
Rewarding Impressions	.29	.09	6.76	.01	.24
Perceptiveness	.35	.12	6.57	.01	-.20
Social Anxiety	.38	.15	6.20	.01	.17
Orientation to Knowledge					
Amount of Disclosure	.16	.03	3.93	.05	.16
Relational Roles Behavior					
Public Rituals	.22	.05	7.13	.01	.22
Rewarding Impressions	.27	.07	5.75	.01	.16
Social Anxiety	.32	.10	5.51	.01	.18
Interaction Management					
Responsiveness	.22	.05	7.17	.01	.22
Social Anxiety	.28	.08	6.05	.01	.20
Tolerance of Ambiguity					
Public Rituals	.19	.04	5.44	.02	.19

Note. N = 149.